



A film crew in the office of The Smithtown News publisher Bernard Paley and (below) in the parking lot shielding the light Saturday, December 3 during filming a scene for the movie Passaic.

-David Ambro photo

Star is born! The Smithtown News office transformed to perfect movie set about 1966 murder

By DAVID AMBRO



The half-century-old decor of **The Smithtown News** office provided the perfect scene for a New Jersey filmmaker who is trying to turn his award-winning screenplay into a major motion picture, **Passaic**.

For writer Michael Klausner, the story is biographical... a son who comes to appreciate his father after his death through his work as a journalist. Mr. Klausner had a strained relationship with his dad, investigative reporter Howard Klausner. After he passed away in 2003, Michael Klausner developed a new appreciation for his father after he read newspaper articles he had written about the February 24, 1966 murder of Judy Kavanaugh, of Clifton, New Jersey.

What caught Michael's eye was the four-year trial of Paul Kavanaugh, the victim's husband, and his employers, Harold and Dorothy Matzner, which is still the longest trial in New Jersey history. In the end, Mr. Kavanaugh, and Mr. and Mrs. Matzner, were acquitted of all charges. And, the murder is still unsolved.

During an interview at **The NEWS** office after filming Saturday, Mr. Klausner said he realized that his father was the only journalist reporting about the possibility of the accused being innocent.

"I just kept getting drawn into it more and more and saw this as a real interesting story," Mr. Klausner said. "When I looked at the original story about this, when I first heard about it, I just thought it was fantastic. It is a horrible story and the problem with it is that there is no real ending because the murders were never solved. These people were found not guilty."

Mr. Klausner said the only fictional part in **Passaic** is that in the end of the film the murder is solved. Everything else in his story though is true. The story is a flashback to the Kavanaugh murder through the eyes of a young man, Will Kramer, who discovers the work of his father on the murder case.

When Mr. Klausner wrote the screenplay it won an award at a prestigious contest and he was encouraged to make it into a 15 minute short film to market for a major motion picture or, in the alternative, a multi-episode series. That's what brought Mr. Klausner to **The Smithtown News** office at 1 Brookside Drive this weekend.

Mr. Klausner was looking for an old newsroom, and **The NEWS** was just what he was looking for. He said the desks, the accessories, the wall treatments, etc. were all perfect for filming numerous scenes for the movie.

The **Passaic** crew arrived at the office Friday, December 2 along with Director Doug Underdahl. They spent the afternoon rearranging furniture and transforming various rooms into sets for filming. A corner of the editorial office was made to look like a police detective's office of a half-century ago, and another corner was made to look like an old newspaper office with typewriters, rotary phones, ashtrays and Rolodexes. They picked a section of hallway and an area of the bathroom for filming short scenes, and the advertising office was converted into a newsroom.

The NEWS publisher Bernard Paley's office was transformed into the office of newspaper editor Edward Marshall, played by Patrick Collins, who has starred in several movies and has appeared on television.

The cast and crew arrived at **The NEWS** early Saturday, December 3 and filmed all day until about 3:30 p.m. They were then back Sunday, December 4 and filmed all day, work that was slowed in the morning by a localized power outage, and again they were finished by about 3:30 p.m. and got all of the shots they had planned for. Part of the crew then stayed behind and put everything back the way it was, or a little better.

"I had a ball. They are really good people," said Mr. Collins during an interview before he headed back home to Westchester after he was the first one finished with his scenes Saturday.

Mr. Collins said he likes the story, especially that it is in two different time periods, a son flashing back to the work of his father. "It could be a series," he said. "Whatever the son pulls out could be another story."

Mr. Klausner was born in Passaic and raised in New Jersey. He when to Syracuse University, where he met Elizabeth Paley, daughter of **The NEWS** publisher Bernard Paley. He showed Ms. Paley the screenplay and when he was talking to her recently he said that he was looking for places to film and she told him to go look at **The NEWS** office.

Mr. Klausner said Associate Publisher Jennifer
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Director Doug Underdahl lines up a shot during the filming of Passaic at The Smithtown News office Saturday.

Filming

(Continued from page 3)

Paley Ambro sent him photographs of **The NEWS** office. "I thought, 'this could work,' because of these steel desks," he said, knocking his knuckle on the front of the green desk in front of him.

"This is what makes it. You can't find this stuff," he said. "If we had to ship these around. These things weigh a ton. This office was probably built around these desks. I don't even know how you got those desks up the stairs."

"It was like I struck gold when I came here," Mr. Klausner said. "Seriously, everything is great and this reminds me of my dad's office. I remember going to his office and seeing stuff there so I feel familiar here. It's nice."

"We needed a 1960s era location and we knew we could dress this place more easily. We had access to a lot of other offices, but the way the window treatments, the blinds, it didn't have the right feel and it was going to look fake. It wouldn't match this," Mr. Klausner said. "You have these steel-case desks here, which is what reporters had in 1966, which is just perfect."

Mr. Klausner said although they did not settle on the location until recently, plans for the weekend shoot at **The NEWS** office had been in the planning stages since August. "We just drew a line in the sand and said we are going to film the first week in December," he said. "A good way to do a movie is to push that way."

He said they have been casting and

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at The Smithtown News office

that they also have several other locations in New Jersey where they will be filming other scenes. "Location was the hardest thing and we struck gold right here. It's great because we have this facility to ourselves, it is conveniently located near food sources, and transportation and the actors are all from New York and the crew is from New York so it is easy to get here, and it worked out."

He said Dunkin' Donuts was handy, they catered Italian meals both days, and they enjoyed the services Smithtown had to offer. He also said that filming went perfectly this past weekend. "It's a professional union crew, all of the actors are from SAG [the Screen Actor's Guild] we had a schedule to meet and we hit it dead on," Mr. Klausner said.

A journalism major in the Newhouse School at Syracuse University, Mr. Klausner said he never followed in his father's footsteps as a reporter because his dad never made enough money, so he went into business school. Mr. Klausner said making the short will cost about \$50,000. To film the major motion picture will cost about \$1.5 million.

The story though is good. It has mob ties that brings in a second murder, drug deals, pornography, all centering around the work of a journalist. Mr. Klausner said he intends to take the short on the independent film circuit to try to generate interest. He said that when he was researching the book he called Dorothy Matzner. She had written a book, **Justice**, about the murder and trial, his father was mentioned throughout. When he introduced himself as Howard Klausner's son, there was a gasp on the phone. "She said my father was the only one who believed in them," Mr. Klausner said.

She told Michael that her husband doesn't talk about the trial. He is a philanthropist and restaurant owner in Florida, where he runs the annual Palm Springs Film Festival in June. Mr. Klausner said he plans to make that his premiere of Passaic.

"It is going to be interesting to see," he said. "I always try to put him in a good light because the one thing my father said is that he might not be a nice guy, but he's not a murderer either."

"These guys were on death row for a while and they finally got acquitted, yet their reputations were destroyed," Mr. Klausner said. "Some people, right up until today, still believe they were involved with the murder."



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: A camerawoman (left) lines up a shot during filming at **The NEWS** office. An old newsroom desk (above) was used for a scene in a 1966 police detective's office.

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